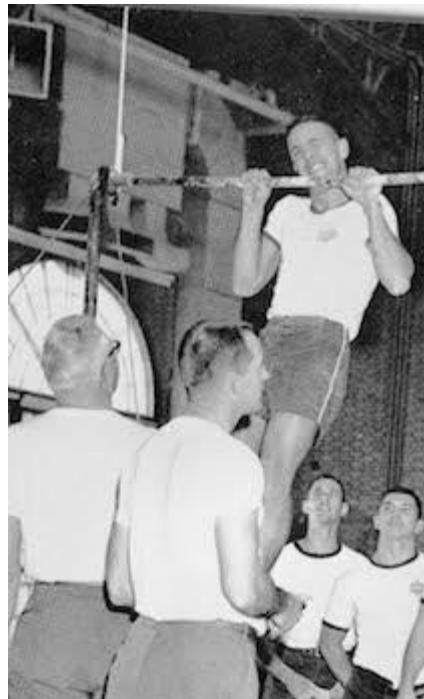




## PE for '63



### Of the many requirements

to enter the US Naval Academy in 1959, none was more front and center than demonstrated athletic ability. In addition to the physical exam, there was a Candidate Fitness Assessment that consisted of a battery of physical and motor fitness events to measure muscular strength and endurance, power, balance, and agility. And once you were in, you were expected to participate in sports. Three seasons per year. The default position was Battalion Cross Country. Didn't make it onto any of your Company sports teams? no problem - you were on your Battalion Cross Country team.

Throughout our four years, we received training in everything from Martial Arts to Swimming In Your White Works. We all have some stories of those days - some poignant, some funny, some traumatic. What do you remember? Send a story to [mike@blackledge.com](mailto:mike@blackledge.com) and let's share them via this collection.

## Boxing

**Steve Coester (18<sup>th</sup> Co):** During plebe summer I signed up for boxing instead of tennis because I liked all those sit ups while pounding on my stomach. I figured I



could go out for tennis in the Spring. I soon found out that boxing wasn't for me because my hand speed was nonexistent and I tended to get hit a lot.

So after a few weeks and a broken nose I quit boxing and headed out to the tennis courts.

**Mike Blackledge (4<sup>th</sup> Co):** Coester's story made me think of my own, when I thought I was doing OK in our boxing class, as I was tall (almost 6' 2") and thus could keep my company-mates away in the sparring instruction with my reach. However, for the 'test' I was shocked that the coaches put me in the ring with Peter Browne, in my memory even taller, and my confidence dropped like the recent Dow Jones. We proceeded to pummel the heck out of each other. Traumatized me for life, and I bring it up with Pete Browne every reunion. And he seems like such a nice guy!

The best non-competitive boxing story is that by Lou Simpleman. He roomed with wrestler Mike Harman and plebe boxer Robbie "Fig" Newton (see top of Champions plaque). Lou saw Robbie sitting on the sidelines during our instruction, and he started taunting him, something like, "Come on, get in here - what, are you afraid of what I might do to you?" He finally got Robbie into the ring, and in about 3.2 nanoseconds, found himself on the mat, looking up with a dazed expression. Talk about hand speed. Thank goodness for headguards.

**Peter Browne (19<sup>th</sup> Co):** Blackie, as I remember you and I were pretty evenly matched! I also remember going against Frank Eissing from my company. I had a reach advantage but Frank waited for me to throw a punch and clobbered me with a combo before mine could land. Another guy with very fast hands! Turns out Frank was number one in our class in PT!

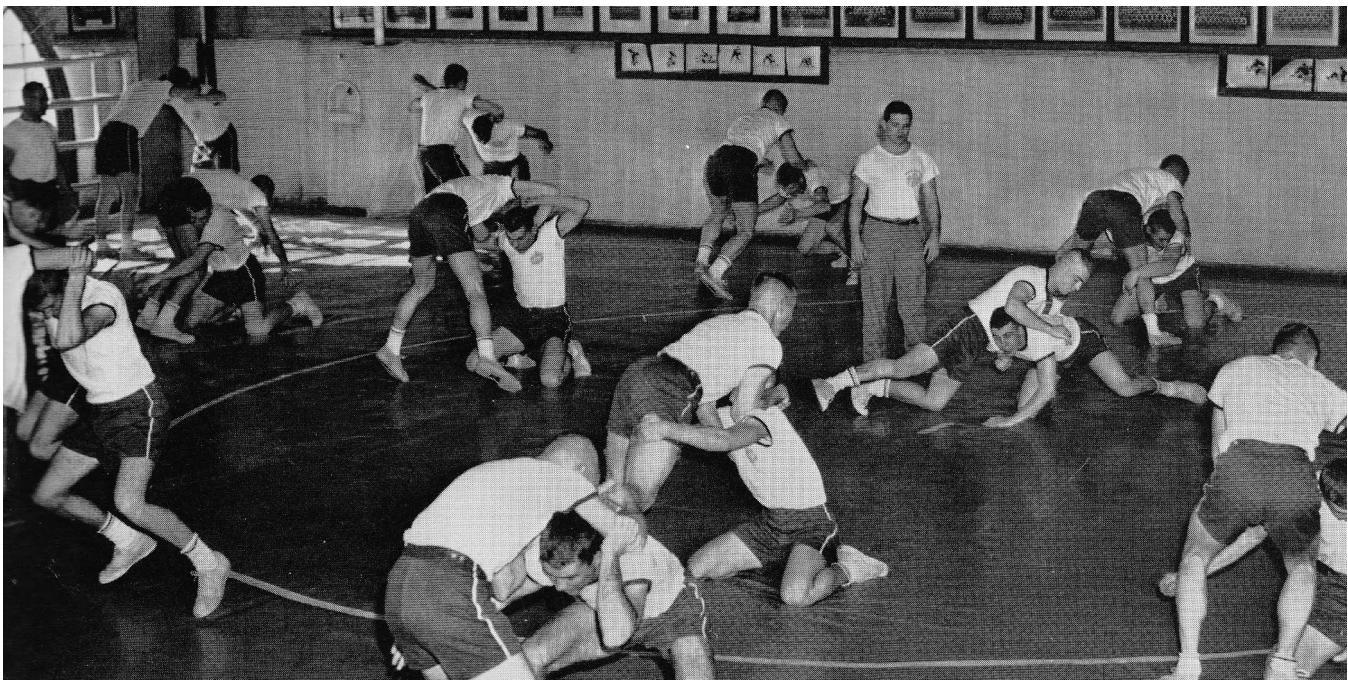
**Mike Harman (4<sup>th</sup> Co):** I can add a few details of the somewhat famous Fig/Simp fight. It happened during plebe year during a normal boxing class. Usually Simp and I boxed each other and being roommates we pummeled each other with reckless abandon. Fig looked on and helped coach us. On this particular day I had a wrestling match coming up so was not supposed to box. As you said Simp was dancing around the ring yelling at Fig to come up and fight him. (When we were wrestling around in the room Fig did not seem so invincible.) Simp continued to rag on Fig referring occasionally to something a chicken left on the bottom of his cage.

The coach said definitely **no!** But Fig told the coach not to worry because he would just dance around and would not hit Simp. So the bout started. Simp rushed in swinging away. In a very short time Simp using his size and the fact that Fig would not hit him managed to push Fig into a corner. Fig was doing a great job of bobbing and slipping punches but being pushed into a corner for just an instant, instincts took over and Fig landed a short left hook to Simp's chin. This might be my fading memory, but it seemed to me that Simp's feet came up to the same level as his head and then he landed flat on his back. He crawled out of the ring and that was the end of the fight.

**Robbie Newton [aka The Fig] (4<sup>th</sup> Co):** As for the occasion of Lou Simpleman's and my sparring session (good memory Mike B), I say the following. Though it may not have been as quick as nano seconds, as I thought I took it easy on Lou (carried him ... in boxing speak) for 1 minute, (at least I intended to, being a roommate and all). But then again I may have had to get ready for a come-around (had plenty of those), or maybe it was chow call. Thus I may have had to get out of there quickly; which would have accounted for the quickness in the dispensing of Lou. Had I known about "Rope a-Dope" at that time, might have used that on him...ha ha. Anyway, he was a good sport, and continued as a roommate along with Wrestling Champ Mike Harmon. Lou probably got sick of hearing Mike and me arguing over whether a boxer or a wrestler was tougher (though Mike and I related to the mutual intensity of getting in shape for both sports, not to mention making weight). Squash (Lou's sport) was never part of the argument...LOL. Just kidding Lou as I respected it...a good fast game. You may recall the time you turned the tables...invited me on the squash court for a few games, running me ragged, dispensing of me (if not in nano-seconds) in record time...(as they say; payback is a B..ch). Anyway, always good to hear from classmates.

**Charlie Minter (9<sup>th</sup> Co):** I think it may have been our Second Class year, or whenever it was that we had to learn how to put on a boxing 'smoker' in case we were ever assigned shipboard/squadron collateral duty as PE Officer. Everyone in the class was assigned some role (coach, boxer, timekeeper, Ref, etc.). John Aucella [also 9<sup>th</sup> Co] and I were to box as heavy-weights as I recall. The coach took us aside and said that he wanted to test the Ref to see him handle a boxer being decked (counting, cleaning his gloves as he got up, etc.). So we decided that I would be the one to deck John. John and I rehearsed our moves so we could make the knock-down punch look real. When the time came, we put on a good show and my punch did look pretty good. John went down very realistically. The plan was for him to stay down through a partial count and get back up. The problem was that John couldn't help from starting to laugh uncontrollably while prone on the canvas. His body was sort of bouncing. Anyway, he got counted out so I don't recall if the Ref ever did get to demonstrate what the coach wanted. I don't recall who was performing the Ref duty.

## Wrestling



**Jim Oakes, Jr. (21<sup>st</sup> Co):** I remember our wrestling test plebe year. Bob Easton and I were company mates (1st) and didn't have to do PE since we were on the Plebe football team but we had to make up PE tests after the season was over. We reported to the wrestling coach with some others for the makeup test. The coach said one of us had to be "shirts" and the other "skins". Bob whipped off his shirt immediately, so I was "shirts" by default. We did all the positions and Bob was like a "greased pig" with all his perspiration on his upper body. He threw me around grabbing my shirt like I was a rag doll. I had never wrestled before and my 6th sense told me that Bob had. I passed the test I guess on sheer determination and attitude. I never gave up trying even though Bob "pinned" me in every position. Maybe the coach had sympathy on me since Bob was a tough lineman who chewed and spit tobacco, and I was a quarterback.

## Swimming

**Steve Coester (18<sup>th</sup> Co):** It seems like plebe year we spent an awful lot of time in the Natatorium. Early in plebe summer there was the sorting out of the swimmers versus the non-swimmers. I remember Coach Higgins teaching us the basic breaststroke. I also remember a big pot belly hanging over his Speedo but I just found out this info about him:



**John Herbert Higgins** (May 8, 1916 – August 1, 2004) was an American competition swimmer and swimming coach. He competed during the transition time, when breaststroke swimmers were allowed to combine and swimming the butterfly arm stroke with the usual frog kick. Using this technique, he finished fourth at the 1936 Summer Olympics in the 200 m, and set two world records in the 100 m breaststroke event in 1935 and 1936. During the Olympic trials, he set a national record in the 200 m breaststroke that was unbeaten until 1948. During his career, Higgins won 11 national titles and set 10 world records in breaststroke and medley events. In 1971, he was inducted into the International Swimming Hall of Fame.

Also it seemed that our swimming days were always when the weather was frightful. Wearing our reef coats, carrying poncho and an armful of books we'd trudge to McDonough Hall and the Natatorium where it never felt much warmer than outside. Remember floating in our khakis and trying to make floats out of the pants. But the two things I really remember about the Natatorium are the tower jump and the forty minute swim. I had swum since I was a little tyke and was a lifeguard during high school so the water didn't phase me but I never cared much for heights. All through plebe summer I would stare up at that darn platform thirty feet up in the rafters and wonder if I would make the jump. Now consider classmates who feared both water and heights. It had to be a terrifying proposition. Well finally the day came for us to climb the rope ladder up to the tower and make the leap using approved abandon ship technique or else be assigned to the dreaded sub-squad with the promise of having to climb to the tower every day until finally able to jump. Our squad jumped into the pool and swam over to the rope ladder and one by one started climbing the swaying rope. I remember Cole Lindell reaching the top and doing a flip off the tower into the pool. I followed not even liking climbing the ladder until I reached the tower and cautiously toed my way to the edge. At this point for the first time in my life I discovered the power of peer pressure. There was no way I was going to let my fellow mids see how terrified I was and I stepped off the tower and one second later hit the water. Never again was I afraid of heights.

It went that way for most, but a few just couldn't handle it and wouldn't jump. They had to climb back down the treacherous ladder and alas be put on the sub-squad. I really felt for them for it could have been me. The other experience I remember was the forty minute swim where we had to swim some required number of laps around the pool and never touch the sides or else we were disqualified and, bingo-off to the sub-squad. I don't remember if we were in clothes or swimming suits. As I said I was a decent swimmer so I was charging around the pool intent on getting a 4.0. Suddenly I felt a firm hand on my head, which pushed me under the water. I thought; another bored swimmer who wanted to mess around. So I reached up and grabbed his leg and pulled him under. Oh no! The hand that submerged me belonged not to a strong swimmer but to one of those barely able to float who was floundering along trying to make at least the minimum number of laps. He choked and gasped and flailed over to the side of the pool where he was immediately disqualified. For fifty-five years I've felt terrible about that incident.

My final Natatorium memory is from I think first class year. If we could swim four hundred yards in some specified time we could validate the whole course of instruction. This should have been a piece of cake for me, but I had never swum for time. I started out like I was in a race and by about three hundred yards I had exhausted myself and sheepishly dropped out, meaning I had to go to every darn lesson. I counted that as a personal failure. I'm sure others have memories from their time in the pool, but these are mine.

## Crew

**Felix deGolian (19th):** I recently became aware that a plaque dedicated to Navy crews that ever won the eastern sprints will be dedicated in the USNA boat house on March 5 [2016]. Included will be the year of a particular event followed by a listing of the crew members and the coach. '63 will be well represented. In the spring of '60

our heavyweight plebes walked away with it. Included were Wanneka, Pero, Anderson, Thrasher, Schall, Fontana, Krohne, Konold and Omohundro. In '61 all of those guys less Mike Wanneka (who left school) plus Larry Graham rowed in either the 1st or 2nd varsity boats that won the event. In addition, our lightweight crew won the 2nd varsity (then called JV) event. From our class that boat included Hansen, Bond, Kozak, and yours truly. Karl won again the next year, '62, while in the 1st varsity boat. It's nice to be reminded of how well our guys represented USNA over those years.



## Tennis

**Jim Oakes, Jr. (21<sup>st</sup> Co):** This memory involved tennis our plebe year. As you recall the tennis courts were on the left (east) side of Stribling walk as you headed to Bancroft Hall. I had played recreational tennis growing up in San Mateo, CA, but had never had a lesson. I had a pretty good serve and fair ground strokes. During our obligatory tennis PE class, Coach Bos could evidently see some potential and ordered me to report



Tennis '63

for plebe tennis practice. He told me to play the # 14 or 15 player and I won. As I recall I won 2 or 3 matches and then got beat. I then headed back to the football field. However, I play tennis about 3 times a week (doubles) today and have the past 40 years. I am also a USTA referee and ITA chair umpire for Division 1 and 2 college matches. Tennis is a great sport that you can play until you are 100. Anybody coming to San Francisco who wants to play, give me a call.

**Steve Coester (18<sup>th</sup> Co):** I began playing tennis when I was thirteen and got good enough to make my high school team. Kirkwood (MO) High was a tennis powerhouse and during my junior and senior years we compiled thirty-five wins and just one loss. I wasn't a star player just holding down the number three or four spot. Still I figured I was good enough to play at USNA. But during plebe summer I signed up for boxing instead of tennis because I liked all those sit ups while pounding on my stomach. I figured I could go out for tennis in the Spring. I soon found out that boxing wasn't for me because my hand speed was nonexistent and I tended to get hit a lot. So after a few weeks and a broken nose I quit boxing and headed out to the tennis courts. The plebe coach told me to go away because they had already chosen the plebe team. This was still during plebe summer for gosh sake. I finally convinced the coach to let me try out with the condition that I had to start at the bottom challenging each person above me. Eventually I made it up to the number five position which meant I made the starting team of six singles lines plus three doubles lines. I earned my plebe letter.

Youngster year I went out for varsity not expecting to make the team even though I had matured and improved a lot since plebe year. One day we showed up for practice and Coach Bos said "#1 play #13 and loser turn in your gear." He went through all the other combinations with me at #10 having to play the #3 firstie, a tall studly looking mid with a big game. To everyone's surprise I defeated him in three sets and certainly to his surprise he was cut from the team. During the spring season I wasn't on the first string and never played a match. Second class year I was looking forward to a great year. I was playing #5 singles and played about the first eight matches of the season. Suddenly I had a freak accident to my right wrist and had to try to play heavily bandaged. Didn't play any more matches and failed to letter by a match or two. First class year Coach Potter who was brand new called me into his office and said he didn't want any non-lettered firsties on the team. I explained about the injury that kept me from lettering and finally he agreed that like plebe year I could start on the bottom and challenge my way up. If I made the starting team he'd keep me. This was during the Fall season.

At that time Lee Pekary and Corky Graham ('64) who were #1 and #2 were starring on the squash team so as I challenged my way up the ladder I finally reached #1. They had a set of blue and gold name boards by the varsity courts and it felt good to see my name at the top even though I knew Pekary and Graham would have been there. Impressed my OAO, future wife Yvonne. During the Spring season Coach Potter played me at number five or six singles and number three doubles with our #1 player, Lee Pekary. With Lee to carry me I don't think we ever lost at doubles. I won about two-thirds of my singles matches. In

1963 we lost to Army 5-4 after our number three player sprained his ankle and had to retire. I managed to win both my singles and doubles, so at least I felt I had done my part.

I guess all this shows that determination counts for a lot. I'm a mediocre athlete but it meant more to me to prove myself athletically than to earn academic honors, which came more easily to me. Tennis came in handy while on cruise. During aviation summer I was invited to play tennis with the admiral at Pensacola and first class year Lanny Cox and I played with the admiral on the USS Randolph against the mayor of Valencia, Spain. Nothing like patting the admiral on the butt with your racket and saying, "Nice shot, sir."

The Admiral was thrilled that we won the match and invited Lanny and me to a party for the mayor. We considered that an order and showed up in our dress uniforms. The Flag Lt took one look that these two mids and told us to go away. I suggested he talk to the admiral and he disappeared. Shortly thereafter who arrives at the door with drink in hand but the Admiral. He put his arm around my shoulder and introduced me to all the bigwigs as his tennis partner!

By the way, I'm still playing at age seventy-three. I have two leagues and play four or five times a week. Because of my severe arthritis I quit at age thirty-five for twenty-eight years, but picked up the game again at age sixty-two when my grandson started playing. Thank goodness for lightweight modern rackets.

## Field Ball

**Blackie (4<sup>th</sup> Co):** Does anyone else recall playing Battalion Field Ball? It was a winter sport, and used a lacrosse goal, and as I recall, a volleyball for the ball. You could run with it, and be tackled if you had the ball. We were told that this game was played in only two places: The US Naval Academy and Alcatraz.

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